

Bush: Political Animal

George Herbert Walker Bush, 51, comes freighted with a slightly odd set of qualifications to take over the supposedly apolitical Central Intelligence Agency—most notably, a rather active political ambition. A tall, athletic and charming former Congressman, Bush is thought to have been Gerald Ford's runner-up choice to fill the vice presidency last year. His name is now being mentioned again as a possible Ford running mate next year.

The son of Prescott Bush, a former Republican Senator from Connecticut, George Bush received an impeccable Eastern education at Phillips Academy, Andover, and then at Yale, where he earned a Phi Beta Kappa key and a degree in economics in 1948. Wishing to escape the shadow of his father's success, he migrated to Texas, co-founded the Zapata Petroleum Corp. in 1953 and accumulated a fortune. In 1964, Bush got his baptism in the Texas political wars when he was defeated in a race for the Senate by liberal Democrat Ralph Yarborough. Lowering his sights, Bush was elected to two terms in the House from his home district in Houston. He again sought a Senate seat in 1970, and again was beaten—this time by Democrat Lloyd Bentsen. As a consolation prize, Richard Nixon appointed Bush Ambassador to the United Nations, where his affability gained him widespread popularity.

Informal Manner. In 1972, Nixon summoned Bush from the U.N. to assume the chairmanship of the Republican National Committee. As the Watergate scandal engulfed Nixon, Bush worked hard to reduce the damage to the party. His efforts won him the friendship of Gerald Ford, who in 1974 named Bush chief of the U.S. liaison office in Peking. In that lonely outpost, Bush and his wife Barbara—their five children remained in the U.S.—have with their informal manner made friends among the Chinese. They take bicycle tours around the city, play tennis at the international tennis club, and give hamburger and hot-dog parties on the grounds of the American compound. When the message arrived from Gerald Ford asking him to take over the CIA, Bush was out bicycling.